

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Canceled).

2. (Canceled).

3. (Currently Amended) The An image forming apparatus according to claim 2, for forming an image based on input image data, the image forming apparatus comprising: image storing means for storing the input image data; non-volatile storage means for storing an encryption key; volatile storage means that reads and stores the encryption key stored in the non-volatile storage means when power is on;

encryption and decryption means that encrypts image data using the encryption key prior to the storage of the input image data onto the image storage means, and decrypts the encrypted image data subsequent to the reading of the encrypted image data from the image storage means,

wherein the non-volatile storage means is provided in a system control unit for controlling image forming processing, and

wherein the image storing means, the volatile storage means, and the encryption and decryption means and the non-volatile storage means are arranged provided in a separate unit from the system control unit.

4. (Currently Amended) The image forming apparatus according to claim [[1]] 3, further comprising encryption key generating means for generating a random number and producing the encryption key that contains at least a portion of the generated random number.

5. (Canceled).

6. (Canceled).

7. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 4, further comprising encryption key compression and decompression means for compressing or decompressing the encryption key using a predetermined compression and decompression method,

wherein the compressed encryption key is stored onto the non-volatile storage means and when the encryption key is used, the compressed encryption key is read from the non-volatile storage means.

8. (Canceled).

9. (Canceled).

10. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 7, wherein the encryption key compression and decompression means applies an image compression and decompression unit for compressing or decompressing the image data.

11. (Canceled).

12. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus for forming an image based on input image data, the image forming apparatus comprising:

image storage means for storing the input image data;

display means for displaying an image on a screen so as to prompt a user to input a key a plurality of times when power is on;

input means for capturing a key value of an encryption key input by a user during the setting of the encryption key;

key value determining means for determining whether key values input by the user by a predetermined number of times match each other;

non-volatile storage means for storing the key value input as an encryption key if the key value determining means determines that the key values match each other; and

encryption and decryption means for encrypting the image data using an encryption key prior to the storage of the input image data onto image storage means, and for decrypting the encrypted image data subsequent to the reading of the encrypted image data from the image storage means.

13. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the display means displays the key value captured by the input means, and converts an input key value into a form having no specific meaning.

14. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the display means divides the key value of M digits on an N digits basis (M being

greater than N), and converts a part of the key value of the N digits into a form having no specific meaning as soon as the inputting of the key value of the part of the N digits is completed.

15. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the inputting and displaying of the key value is performed in one of a decimal format and a hexadecimal format.

16. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the inputting and displaying of the key value is performed in one of a decimal format and a hexadecimal format.

17. (Original) The image forming apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the inputting and displaying of the key value is performed in one of a decimal format and a hexadecimal format.

18. (Previously Presented) A method for inputting the setting of an encryption key for use in the encryption of image data, the encryption key being used to store input image data in image storage means, the method comprising the steps of:

displaying an image on a screen so as to prompt a user to input a key a plurality of times when power is on;

capturing key values of the encryption key input by a user;

determining whether the key values input by the user by a predetermined number of times match each other; and

storing, in non-volatile storage means, the input key value as the encryption key when the key values match each other in the key value determining step.

19. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 18, wherein the displaying step displays the key value captured in the capturing step, converts an already input key value into a form having no specific meaning.